

## **K-12 SCHOOLS: CONDITIONS AND CONSIDERATIONS FOR MODIFYING EDUCATIONAL DELIVERY MODELS**

### **Introduction**

Central District Health (CDH) recognizes the value of in-person learning and the challenge of balancing the risks of COVID-19 and educational, social, and emotional supports. More is known about COVID-19 now than at the start of the school year last Fall. CDH continues to monitor case activity in our jurisdiction and we are mindful of the efforts underway to make our educational settings safe for all staff, faculty, and students. We are focused on providing information that will allow school boards to appropriately address the educational needs of students.

**Central District Health supports transitioning more students into the classroom in the Spring of 2021. The following outlines the conditions necessary for determining if, and when, to modify educational delivery models (e.g. from remote to hybrid, hybrid to more days in person). Additional considerations are included to minimize the risk in school settings.**

### **CONDITIONS**

**Stable or declining county case rates.** CDH's bi-weekly case rates are a good indicator of the level of risk in the community. As case rates rise there is an increased risk that COVID-19 will enter into the school from a community exposure. CDH recommends schools monitor closely for spikes or rapid increases, which can make effective contact tracing efforts more challenging for both CDH and the school, and could lead to spread within schools.

**Consistent use of face coverings.** These remain an effective, low-cost way to reduce transmission. Face coverings should be used consistently and appropriately in school settings by school staff and students, especially when physical distancing cannot take place.

**Adequate physical distancing.** Exposure to a positive case remains defined as anyone within 6 feet for more than 15 minutes, cumulative. Maximize space between individual students and staff, or between small pods (i.e. pods are independently spaced groups limited to 3-5 students). Consider communal areas where monitoring space between intermixing students will be more challenging (bus pick-up and drop off, cafeteria, before and after school, hallway passing). Keep six feet between students as much as possible. Encourage use of outdoor spaces when weather permits and non-traditional instructional space (gyms, libraries, auditoriums).

**Ability to effectively isolate and quarantine.** Bringing more students into school buildings could lead to an increased number of exposures, and schools should be prepared to manage the potential rise. All cases and any exposed contacts must follow isolation and quarantine guidelines outlined by [CDH's K-12 School Quarantine Guidance](#) in conjunction with the current guidelines provided by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

- If transmission of COVID-19 is occurring in the physical structure or among a specific team or extracurricular event, schools should modify plans and operate under these modified plans for at least 2 weeks from an identified positive case in order to accurately assess if there is additional risk of transmission occurring.
- Schools should identify individuals who meet the probable case definition and these cases should be contact traced.
- Schools should use the infectious period defined by CDH to determine close contacts.

Reference: [CDH Toolkit for School Leaders: Planning for COVID-19 Scenarios in Schools](#)

**Cleaning and disinfecting.** Enhanced cleaning and disinfecting will need to be in place to account for the increase in students in buildings.

## **CONSIDERATIONS**

**Protecting those most at-risk.** Allowing time for the 65+ population to receive both doses of the vaccine will help to reduce the morbidity and mortality for this vulnerable population. This subgroup became eligible on February 1, 2021, and it is anticipated to be a multi-week process to allow for enough allocation and administration of the vaccine (a tentative timeline for late March/early April is a reasonable estimate). At this time school teachers and staff will also have ample opportunity to be vaccinated providing an additional level of protection.

**School-by-school decisions.** Schools should monitor individual site operations to look for trends in cases and clusters. If clusters are continuous or exposures become rampant, schools may need to have short-term transitions to remote/virtual learning to refine operation plans and work with CDH to determine root causes. School-by-school decisions should consider building layout and class sizes to ensure physical distancing can be maintained as much as possible.

- **Variations in grade levels.** Consider cases, exposures, and quarantine patterns among grade levels. Elementary schools may be able to manage distancing, keep static groups, etc., which may make it easier to prevent clusters.

**Extra-curricular activities.** Any activity where masking and distancing cannot take place is high-risk. Evaluate programs, sports, and other activities offered on behalf of or in partnership with the school to see determine enhanced safety procedures and reduce opportunities for transmission.

### **Policy Considerations**

- School-wide asynchronous learning opportunities should be available to ensure those students that are in isolation or quarantine are able to access quality education as if they were in the classroom.
- Continue to report exposures to CDH and provide timely communication to families.
- A plan for students with higher risk of severe illness who do not wish to attend in-person learning.
- Strengthened communication plans to the school community.